



ETHICAL VIEWS



October 2022 Vol. 137, No. 2 Newsletter of the Philadelphia Ethical Society

SUNDAY PLATFORMS

The public is welcome to join us



Sunday, October 2, 11 AM
Transforming the Pathways to College and the Workforce
Sara Woods,
Philadelphia Futures

For more than 30 years, Philadelphia Futures has supported the aspirations of students who represent the first generation in their families to attend college. CEO and President Sara Woods will discuss the transformative opportunity of the organization's recent merger with Steppingstone Scholars. Together, they will ensure all Philadelphia students graduate from high school with pathways to economic mobility through college and workforce success. Woods, a lawyer by training, is a public advocate who formerly served as head of a nonprofit that recruits, trains, and supports lawyers who volunteer to help low-income Philadelphians.

Sunday, October 9, 11 AM
The Virtue and Value of Keeping Your Mouth Shut
Hugh Taft-Morales, Leader
Philadelphia Ethical Society

Much of American society praises those who speak their minds, regardless of the impact of their words. They urge people to "tell it like it is" and argue, among other things, that keeping opinions and feelings to yourself is unhealthy. Many believe that regular cathartic truth-telling is necessary to be happy and stay sane. Hugh explores a contrary perspective: that—sometimes—silence can be golden. Learn about the circumstances in which keeping your mouth shut is good for yourself and for others.

Sunday, October 16, 11 AM

Embedded Values: AI, Ethics, and Politics,
Chloé Bakalar, Temple University

Engineers are stereotyped as problem-solvers, not philosophers. But philosophy and engineering are deeply intertwined in artificial intelligence, which increasingly powers the world. Philosophy is necessary to understand the values embedded in AI tools and to push for desirable outcomes. Chloé Bakalar discusses the challenges of creating a values-based approach to AI, as well as the role of moral philosophy in this space. An assistant professor of political science at Temple, she researches the relationship between communication and liberal democratic citizenship.

Sunday, October 23, 11 AM

Fun!
Hugh Taft-Morales, Leader



To those who prefer ponderous and intellectually challenging topics on Sunday mornings, "fun" may sound trivial. We often think of fun as something childish, not a proper pursuit for sober-minded adults.

However, fun activities are not simple distractions from more important matters. The characteristics of playfulness, connection, and flow contribute to better health and stronger interpersonal connections. Drawing on the work of science journalist Catherine Price, among others, Hugh explores how fun helps makes life worth living.

Sunday, October 30, 11 AM

Work of the American Constitution Society
Russ Feingold, former U.S. Senator

See more on page 7 for this all-AEU platform.

► **Where They'll Be**

As a general rule, we'll run hybrid platforms when Hugh is the speaker. Platforms with guest speakers will remain on **Zoom**. In-person attendees should be up-to-date on vaccinations/boosters, wear masks, and maintain six feet of separation. Please, read your emails and check the website before you come.

IN THIS ISSUE . . .

Why Democrats are (and shouldn't be) supporting election deniers and extremists; the outsize role of young Black women in elections; bringing books to the incarcerated.

FROM THE LEADER Supporting Liars Is an Ethically Questionable Bet

By Hugh Taft-Morales

POLITICS IN AN ELECTION YEAR MAY NOT BE THE BEST topic for a column by the leader of an Ethical Society. For one thing, there are legal issues. To adhere to the Society's status as a 501(c)(3) non-profit, I am prohibited from supporting political candidates or parties. Also, I have limited political expertise. I don't know a lot about pragmatic methods of gaining and wielding civic power.

I could not hold back, however, when I learned that the Democratic Party was funding the campaigns of extremist, 2020-election-result-denying candidates in Republican primaries. As the [Washington Post](#) and many other publications report, the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC) is "spending money in Republican primaries to try to nominate more extreme—and potentially more beatable—candidates."

For example, in a Republican primary for a U.S. House seat in Michigan, more than \$400,000 of DCCC funds helped John Gibbs defeat incumbent Congressman Peter Meijer. Meijer was one of only 10 Republicans who voted to impeach Trump. Gibbs, by contrast, continues to insist that the 2020 Presidential election was stolen. He also has promoted bizarre conspiracy theories about Democrats engaging in satanic rituals.

And it's not just the DCCC and national races. The Democratic Governors Association and incumbent Illinois Governor J. B. Pritzker dropped a record sum to help elevate State Senator Darren Bailey as Pritzker's opponent in the general election. Bailey, whose campaign bus bears a quote from Ephesians about donning the armor of God to battle the devil, has compared abortion to the Holocaust and once sponsored a resolution to sever Chicago from the rest of Illinois. Similar strategies have been deployed in Maryland, Colorado, and here in Pennsylvania, among other states.

Of course, razor-thin margins in a handful of races will determine control of the U.S. House and Senate. If

the DCCC's strategy works then, practically speaking, it is a success. But I agree with Kathleen Rice, a Democratic representative from New York, who takes a more principled stand. In an article in [Politico](#), Rice acknowledges that "dirty games like this" are politics as usual. "But when you talk about putting money behind candidates who want to come to Washington and destroy our democracy...it's not a political, dirty trick anymore," she said. "It's unconscionable."

Frustration is driving this. Many Democrats tell me we have to fight fire with fire: do what it takes to maintain majorities in both houses. But switching sides in battles

to win the war is inherently risky. In that same *Politico* article, Pramila Jayapal, a Democratic representative from Washington, recalled how Democrats believed that Trump would be the easiest candidate to defeat in 2016. She worries about promoting election deniers and extremists when we're not sure that "we're going to be able to control what voters want at the end of the day."

Arguably, the worst offense these candidates commit is lying. Politicians have always stretched the truth. But normalizing lies in politics has become a cultural cancer threatening

democracy. (See my [platform](#), "Calling Out Outrageous Lies.")

Democrats and mainstream Republicans are, in general, much less cavalier with facts. But while supporting extremist candidates because you think they'll lose isn't—strictly speaking—a lie, neither is it honest. Democratic organizations are putting millions of dollars behind candidates who spew messages they find loathsome. What's more, they are urging citizens to expend their precious votes on these shameless politicians. That, too, is shameless.

That sort of dealing imperils the very notion of "truth." When the quest for power shunts aside truth, integrity, and transparency, politics become very dangerous.

DCCC funds helped John Gibbs defeat incumbent Congressman Peter Meijer – one of only 10 Republicans who voted to impeach Trump.

Hugh Taft-Morales is the Leader of the Philadelphia Ethical Society



BEHIND THE SCENES

Meet Lazema, Who Keeps Our Building Beautiful

by Cheryl Desmond

THIS MONTH, PONDERING WHAT GOES ON BEHIND THE scenes at the Ethical Society, I thought I'd introduce readers to our wonderful housekeeper, Lazema Johnson. Lazema is the person to credit for keeping our building spick, span, and sparkling *clean*! No matter what kind of mess renters leave in the three restrooms—and believe me, some renters do that sort of thing—they are pristine after Lazema comes through.

Lazema joined our staff in 2017. She lives with her son and her partner in the East Mount Airy neighborhood and travels to Center City two (or occasionally three) days every week. One benefit Lazema enjoys is a flexible schedule. She accommodates our needs to work before and after rental events; and we accommodate her personal needs.

Last summer I enjoyed seeing two of her grandsons on Sunday mornings. They played quietly on their own while Lazema cleaned. Her ability to simultaneously work and baby-sit helped out her daughter's family.

Lazema prefers to work in the quiet hours of early mornings or late evenings, so most of you may not have met her. But she is a valued and integral part of our team. Please credit her in your thoughts as you enjoy our spotless building.

Employee Updates

Catching up with other staff: some of you know that our custodian, Greg Williams, had a bit of a health scare last spring, including two trips to the emergency room. Now he is back to his usual self. He continues working through the trials and tribulations of a long-distance relationship with his girlfriend in Virginia. (In case you are wondering how Greg's responsibilities line up with Lazema's: Greg's preferred contributions are in the areas of heavy-furniture wrangling; setting up and being on-call for events; and opening and closing the building.)

The Community Life Coordinator position remains open. We are screening candidates to interview.

As for me, in August I traveled to Great Britain, enjoying a whirlwind tour of bucket list sites in England, Scotland, and Wales. I am just about caught up with the work backlog that built up during that trip.



Thank you!: Lazema Johnson brings the clean.

Money Matters

Turning to finances, this is the first column I've written since the Society's 2021-2022 fiscal year ended on June 30. It was a transitional period for events, what with widespread Covid vaccinations, city-issued color codes indicating risk, and the end of pretty much any guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The Ethical Society came through it OK financially. Reflecting Covid uncertainties, our projected operating budget was conservative: \$213,000 in income and \$216,000 in expenses.

A pleasant surprise was the very strong return of building rentals for events, with total income for the fiscal year of \$232,190. Regular operating expenditures were held to \$221,680. One little problem, though. Remember the air-conditioner replacement for the Auditorium? The final price tag was \$19,000, and that gets deducted. So, operations ended with a small loss of about \$8,500. There's a case to be made for a separate capital budget dedicated to expenses such as air conditioners. But that's a question for another time.

Thanks to the generosity of members and friends, Camp Linden was fully funded for the 2022 season.

If you follow the stock market, you know there was a downturn over the summer. The Society's endowed and restricted funds reflect that. Good thing we're in this for the long haul.

Cheryl Desmond is the office administrator for the Philadelphia Ethical Society.

FROM THE ENDING RACISM TASK FORCE

Young Black Women Prove their Power at the Polls

By John Marshall

YOUNG WOMEN OF COLOR HAVE LED CIVIC AND electoral participation in recent years. That's encouraging because issues that disproportionately affect those women are on the table this election season. In particular, as decisions about abortion rights devolve to the states, women of color are a critical line of defense.

It's a role they already are poised to play. In the 2020 election, voter turnout among young women (55%) outpaced that among young men (44%), according to the [Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement](#) (CIRCLE), which is based at Tufts University. But when CIRCLE dug deeper into its data last winter, the organization discovered racial- as well as gender-based disparities. Young women of color—specifically Black women and Latina women—outpaced young white women on almost every metric of civic engagement. Among other things, they were more likely to recognize their responsibility for improving society and to participate in political activity.

CIRCLE's [study](#) addressed not just perceptions but also actions. Young women of color were more involved in electoral activities, such as registering voters (28% of Latina women, 31% of Black women, and 37% of Asian women, compared with 20% of white women and 20% of young people overall). More than twice the percentage of young Black as young white women had volunteered on political campaigns.

Perhaps not surprisingly, young Black and Latina women were more likely than white women to have taken concrete steps to battle racial injustice and to believe combating violence against people of color should be a high political priority.

Young Black women also have been more active than white women in the reproductive rights movement. And with the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*, the stakes have risen dramatically. In 2019, 38% of abortions were performed on Black women compared to 33% on

white women, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation. That disparity arises from more limited access to health care and, consequently, to contraception and sexual-health services.

That same lack of access for women of color affects their ability to obtain abortions in the post-Roe landscape. More than four in 10 women of child-bearing age who live in states where abortion is or will probably become illegal are women of color. "Moreover, due to underlying structural inequities, women of color have more limited financial resources and may face other increased barriers to accessing abortions if they need to travel out of state for one," reports Kaiser.

More than twice the percentage of young Black as young white women had volunteered on political campaigns

Access to health services, including abortion, allowed all young women to graduate from college in higher numbers and improved their opportunities to have professional careers. Poverty rates decreased as a result. "We...know that the single greatest contributor to persistent poverty among Black women is an unplanned

pregnancy," wrote Marcela Howell, CEO of In Our Own Voice: National Black Women's Reproductive Justice Agenda. "For Black women, Roe has always been the floor, not the ceiling."

To be clear: supporting abortion rights does not require people to abandon their faith or beliefs. They just must agree that the government should not be able to make decisions for women about their own bodies.

According to CIRCLE, more than two-thirds of all young women believe voting and elections can affect racial injustice in this country. In 2020, young women of all races cast hundreds of thousands of votes in key battleground states like Pennsylvania, Arizona, and Florida. This year they once again can shape decisively election results at every level.

John Marshall is a member of the Ending Racism Task Force of the Philadelphia Ethical Society.

ADVENTURES IN VOLUNTEERING Delivering Books Behind Bars

By Leigh Buchanan

IN MY 30S, I READ HELEN PREJEAN'S *Dead Man Walking: The Eyewitness Account of the Death Penalty That Sparked a National Debate*. The horrors of the death chamber—both practical and existential—permeated my nightmares. I obsessively followed capital cases. That led me to the subject of mass incarceration.

This was right after the passage of Bill Clinton's crime bill, which dramatically amped prison construction and encouraged states to adopt severe punishments. I wanted to get involved; but I had two young children and a more-than-full-time job. Then in 2005 I heard about **Concord Prison Outreach** (CPO), a coalition of individuals and faith communities offering educational programs inside prisons and jails around Massachusetts.

I'd never been great shakes as a teacher. But CPO also offered an Outside Library Program to supplement the slim selection of books inside most institutions. Books! Prisons! That was for me.

I joined a team of eight women serving the Northeastern Correctional Center, a minimum-security facility in Concord, Massachusetts, the town next to mine. Every other Thursday at 6:45 PM two of us would pull into the parking lot and unload around 40 books, which one of the inmates—that evening's "assistant librarian"—helped us carry. Inside, we signed in and handed our drivers licenses to a guard behind a bulletproof window. Another guard leaned into a microphone. "Outside library! Outside library!" loudspeakers blared throughout the prison.

The library was a small room with around 30 bookcases, populated largely with aging bestsellers and the kinds of random titles you typically find at flea markets. Three or four computer terminals, without Internet access, sat on desks for use in legal research. We set up at a table, spreading out the books, a clipboard with request forms, and pens. A few patrons would be waiting for us. Mostly, they arrived in clusters following dinner or recreation.

Inmates would write down books they wanted: sometimes a title but often just a genre or a subject. ("Something like *The Shining*." "Something about old cars.") During the week, another volunteer would track down their requests at the Concord Public

Library. She'd also throw in a few wild-card selections she thought someone might find interesting. The inmates collected their books, signed them out, and returned or renewed them two weeks later.

Many library patrons just liked hanging around our table. We were not supposed to talk about our outside lives with them.

But we discussed books and TV shows and current events. The *Game of Thrones* series was popular; and when the HBO show aired our clients clamored for episode recaps. Inmates who trained puppies as service animals often brought around their furry charges for pats.

Some inmates found out that I wrote for an entrepreneurship magazine. (The library had a subscription, and occasionally my photo appeared.) I spent many evenings listening to their business plans: for the motorcycle-detailing shops and video-rental machines and pit-bull-breeding services they planned to start after release. One guy was always after me to read and critique his screenplays.

Over the 10 years I volunteered for CPO, most of the library patrons we knew returned to their lives outside. Occasionally someone got into a fight—or worse—and was transferred to the medium-security prison nearby. That was always hard to hear.

If you measure gratification by appreciation received, volunteering in a prison is off-the-charts satisfying. In prison, many people feel forgotten or shunned. Library patrons constantly told us how much it meant that we performed a service for them. More important, they said, was that we spent time with them, talking and interacting like normal human beings.

Leigh Buchanan is editor of Ethical Views and a member of the Philadelphia Ethical Society.

Photo by Auntieruth through Wikimedia Commons

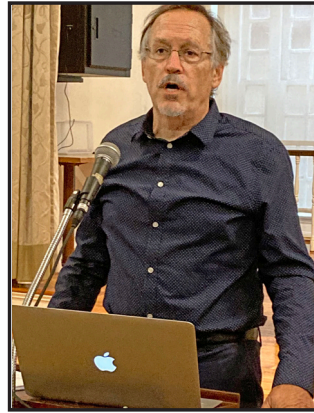


RETURN TO RITTENHOUSE

On September 11, 16 members and friends gathered in the Auditorium for the season's first hybrid platform, while several dozen more joined through Zoom. From here on in, we'll be meeting both in-person and online every other Sunday, when Hugh is the speaker. The rest of the time, we're on Zoom. If infection rates rise, all bets are off.



Back at the podium: Michael Black-Smith, the Society's president, welcomed returning members and guests



Arrivederci, Italia! Home from his travels in Italy, Hugh mused on the motives that draw people to gun culture.



Covid coda: Rollin Wilber is no longer a virtual virtuoso. After two-and-a-half years performing over Zoom from his home, Rollin sat down at the Ethical Society's grand piano, for the September 11 platform. He played Pagodas, by Claude Debussy and Fantasy in C Minor, by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.

SEEKING PEACE IN THE STREETS



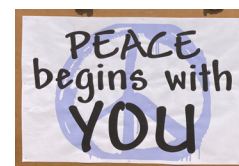
The Society and its members turned out for Peace Day Philly: a local celebration of the United Nations International Day of Peace. This year's theme: End racism. Build Peace.



Touchdown! Hugh joined a cheer at the Footballs Not Firearms rally. More than 100 young people, dozens of police officers, City Councilmember Maria Quiñones Sánchez, three Eagles alumni, and three Eagles cheerleaders gathered to encourage better community relationships and safer streets. One hundred footballs, donated by the Eagles, were given away. (Photo: Alliyah Maduro)



PES and Peace: Society members (left to right) Kate Esposito, Hugh, Taft-Morales, Betsy Lightbourn, John Marshall, Ruth Dubinsky, Christian Hayden, Tara Swartz, and Nick Sanders joined the crowd celebrating Peace Day on the North Apron of City Hall. A minute of silence, speeches, songs, and art projects marked the occasion. (Photo: Dan Rosenak)



UPCOMING EVENTS

Forecast calls for heavy hybrid with a chance of Zoom. To be safe, check the website or Bulletin before you go.

Tuesday, October 4, 6:15 PM-8:30 PM

Get out the Vote! Phone Bank

It is urgent that informed people vote! Join us for a phone bank at the Ethical Society building to ensure voters have a plan and commit to it. POWER staff will be on-hand to train and assist. We ask participants to commit to masking and vaccine precautions. *Bring your cell phone and laptop or tablet!* We'll provide beverages, snacks, and a great time! RSVP to [Kate](#). Write VOTE SMART in the subject field.



Sunday, October 9, 7 PM

Introduction to Ethical Humanism

This session about the Philadelphia Ethical Society—offered both in-person and on [Zoom](#)—is intended chiefly for folks new to our special brand of humanism. But anyone is welcome. After a short presentation, Hugh will take questions and coordinate a conversation. Those attending in-person will share refreshments. Those on Zoom: sorry, but you'll have to bring your own snacks!

Saturday, October 22, 10:30 AM-noon (Zoom)

Monday, October 24, 5:30 PM-7 PM (in-person)

October book discussion: *Behaving Decently: Kurt Vonnegut's Humanism* by Wayne Laufert

Join Hugh for a discussion of *Behaving Decently: Kurt Vonnegut's Humanism*, a new title from the Humanist Press. Author Wayne Laufert, a former newspaper reporter and editor, is a member of the Baltimore Ethical Society. The [Zoom](#) event is a joint session with Baltimore.

VOTER EDUCATION SESSIONS

**Every Tuesday and Thursday until November 3
10 AM to noon and 6:30 PM to 8:30 PM**

This election season POWER Interfaith is hosting voter-education phone banks on Zoom. Sign up [HERE](#) for the sessions in which you would like to participate. Each session will begin with a prayer reflection (after all, this is POWER) and training. Technical support will be available throughout. You'll need your phone and a laptop or tablet. Let's help register voters, then make sure they mark their calendars and have plans to vote!

Phone icon by Ellipol through Wikimedia Commons

SUNDAY PLATFORMS

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Sunday, October 30, 11 AM

Work of the American Constitution Society

Russ Feingold, former United States Senator



Russ Feingold, a Democrat from Wisconsin, is perhaps best known for his sponsorship, with John McCain, of the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act of 2002. He is now president of the [American Constitution Society](#) (ACS), a national, 250-chapter network of lawyers and law students.

Feingold will explain how the ACS offers platforms for discussion, opportunities for networking and mentoring, and activities in support of a progressive vision of the law. ACS works closely with the Biden-Harris Administration and elected officials to recommend qualified and diverse candidates for judicial and other legal positions. It also engages in efforts to protect democracy, advance truth and justice, and transform our laws and legal systems to protect the lives of all people. This is an all-American Ethical Union platform, so [Zoom](#) or join by phone. (Meeting ID: 891 9333 5697)

VEGAN TURKEY? ECO-FRIENDLY TREE?



The holidays—replete with joy and family but also with consumerism and waste—approach. Do our members have practices or suggestions for keeping celebrations ethical? For example, does anyone donate to charities in lieu of presents or consider sustainability while shopping? *Ethical Views* wants to know. Send a note to [Leigh Buchanan](#).



SUNDAY SERVICES

11 AM

Ethical Views is published monthly
except July and August.

Executive Editor, Leigh Buchanan

Copy Editors, Henry Pashkow, Nick Sanders

Web Administrators, Cheryl Desmond, Nick Sanders

Layout, Celeste Hardester

Production, Cheryl Desmond

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PHILADELPHIA ETHICAL SOCIETY COMMITTEES

Our Society is sustained by all of its volunteers who serve on the many committees that fulfill our purpose and guide our decisions. The following generous members serve as chairs of the committees, which meet at the times shown. Members and interested others are welcome to attend. Email us to learn more at office@phillyethics.org.

Board of Trustees

Michael Black-Smith

Sunday, Oct. 16, 6 PM

Building Committee

Michael Black-Smith

Wednesday, Oct. 19, 6 PM

Camp Linden Committee

Jeffrey Dubb

Wednesday, Oct. 19, 5 PM

Education Committee

Betsy Lightbourn

Wednesday, Oct. 5, 5:30 PM

Ending Racism Task Force

Sylvia Metzler/Erik Younge

Saturday, Oct. 15, 11 AM

Ethical Action Committee

Open chair

Next meeting TBA

Finance Committee

Nick Sanders

Wednesday, Oct. 12, 5 PM

Media Committee

Drew Snyder

No meeting this month

Social Committee

Ruth Dubinsky

Sunday, Oct. 2, 12:30 PM

For suggestions regarding this newsletter, email Leigh Buchanan leighebuchanan@gmail.com



Ready for his closeup: When PES member Stan Horwitz signed up for a study about the experiences of family caregivers helping elderly relatives handle finances, he had no idea CNBC was sponsoring the research. A senior producer at the network was so impressed by Stan's responses that she asked him to appear in a segment of "The News with Shepard Smith," which aired September 1. Interviewed at Logan Circle, Stan described how, following a fall, his father's long-term care "whittled away \$300,000 in four years."

HUMANIST HUMOR

"We're starting our own religion at last. The Order of Frisbeetarians. We believe that when you die, your soul ascends to a rooftop and you can never get it back."

~ Bono, musician